

VZCZCXRO8181
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHMOS RUEHPW
DE RUEHKU #1637/01 1291049
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 091049Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4355
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 KUWAIT 001637

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NSC FOR RAMCHAND, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS
FOR ZEYA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2026

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KU](#) [ISLAMISTS](#)

SUBJECT: UNDERSTANDING THE KUWAITI MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD'S
POLITICAL WING: THE ISLAMIC CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT, PART I

- REF: A. KUWAIT 1057 - MFA UNDERSECRETARY DESCRIBES VISIT
OF HAMAS LEADER
- [1](#)B. KUWAIT 995 - FREEDOM AGENDA: ISLAMISTS SHARE
VIEWS ON ELECTORAL REFORM IRAQ AND IRAN
 - [1](#)C. KUWAIT 661 - KUWAIT SHI'A AND SUNNI CONDEMN IRAQ
SHRINE BOMBING SOME BLAME U.S.
 - [1](#)D. KUWAIT 467 - AMIR APPROVES NEW CABINET: SHI'A
AND ICM GAIN
 - [1](#)E. 05 KUWAIT 4313 - FREEDOM AGENDA: MUSLIM
BROTHERHOOD SPOKESMAN SAYS ORGANIZATION
COMMITTED TO WORKING WITHIN POLITICAL
SYSTEM
 - [1](#)F. 05 KUWAIT 3266 - READING WRITING AND QUR'ANIC
RECITATION: THE ISLAMIST INFLUENCE IN
KUWAIT'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM PART II
 - [1](#)G. 05 KUWAIT 656 - ISLAMISTS IN KUWAIT: CONTOURS OF
A GROWING INFLUENTIAL FORCE
 - [1](#)H. 04 KUWAIT 1274 - NEW ICM LEADERS STRIVE FOR
MAINSTREAM
 - [1](#)I. 04 KUWAIT 495 - KUWAIT FINANCE HOUSE OPENS UP TO
OFAC
 - [1](#)J. 03 KUWAIT 3536 - POLITICAL ISLAM WORKING GROUP:
KUWAIT SNAPSHOT
 - [1](#)K. 03 KUWAIT 3217 - DEFEATED ISLAMIST OFFERS VIEWS
ON KUWAITI POLITICS
 - [1](#)L. 91 KUWAIT 2068 - KUWAIT'S PRO-DEMOCRACY GROUPS:
SKETCH OF THE ICM

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

(C) This is Part I of a two-part cable. Part I deals with the origins of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), its political influence and popular support, its structure and leadership, and the relationship between the ICM and the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood (KMB). Part II addresses the ICM's policies and publications, and the potential for limited USG engagement with the organization to promote political reform in Kuwait.

[1](#)1. (C) Introduction and Summary: The Islamic Constitutional Movement (Al-Haraka Al-Dusturi Al-Islamiyya), the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, is one of, if not the, largest and most influential political associations in Kuwait. (Note: The Government does not officially recognize political parties. End note.) As the country begins to slowly implement political reforms, the ICM will play an increasingly important role in Kuwait's political life. This cable, based on numerous conversations with ICM leaders and members, and Kuwaiti political analysts, examines the ICM's origin, organizational structure, affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, policies, and, ultimately, potential as a pro-reform partner.

[1](#)2. (C) After a crushing electoral defeat in 2003, the ICM

reorganized, emerging with a new, younger leadership and a reformist agenda (ref H). Since then, ICM leaders claim the organization's popularity and political influence has increased. Highlighting this growing influence, one of the ICM's top leaders, Dr. Ismail Al-Shatti, was appointed Minister of Communications in the recently-formed Cabinet (ref D). Today, the ICM is one of the most vocal advocates of political reform in Kuwait. However, with respect to USG interests, our concerns center on the organization's support for very conservative social policies, such as the implementation of Islamic Shari'a; its criticisms of U.S. policy towards Israel; and its connection to the Muslim Brotherhood.

13. (S/NF) While these concerns should not be overlooked, neither should they be overblown. It is important to recognize that the ICM's commitment to democracy appears genuine: the ICM, and previously the KMB, has participated in Kuwaiti politics peacefully for decades. Many of the ICM's social policies are more representative of the organization's conservative tribal base than they are of MB ideology. The notable exception is Islamic Shari'a which remains a contentious issue, but not one that should obstruct constructive U.S. engagement with the ICM. In tandem with our support for Kuwaiti liberals, occasionally nominating moderate ICM members for IVP and MEPI-funded programs focusing on political reform would expose them to the USG's vision for democratic reform in Kuwait and the region, help us better understand the organization and social objectives of the ICM and KMB, and hopefully further marginalize the ICM's more conservative "old guard." The alternative is to promote political reform here without engaging the political associations that may benefit most if these reforms are implemented. Liberal and Shi'a political associations are

KUWAIT 00001637 002 OF 004

not as organized and popular as the Islamists, and the increasingly influential (Islamist) Salafi associations are more reactionary and less compromising than the ICM. End summary and introduction.

Origins of the ICM

14. (C) The ICM was established as an independent, uniquely Kuwaiti political movement on March 30, 1991 by members of the KMB disillusioned by the international Muslim Brotherhood's (IMB) tacit support for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 (refs H and L). (Note: The Muslim Brotherhood (Jamiyyat Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen), founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna, has branches in roughly 70 countries. End note.) The ICM grew out of the Social Reform Society (SRS), a KMB-affiliated Islamic charity that still exists. The SRS was created in 1961 as a reconstituted version of the Islamic Guidance Society (IGS), the original MB organization in Kuwait. The IGS was established in the early 1950s by Abdul Aziz Al-Ali Al-Mutawa, the brother of the current SRS chairman and KMB spiritual mentor, Abdullah Al-Ali Al-Mutawa, but lost influence in the staunchly Arab nationalist Kuwait after the IMB supported an attack on Egyptian President Gamel Abdul Nasser in 1956. It was finally closed in 1959.

15. (C) Initially, the SRS focused primarily on promoting its conservative social agenda. The organization lobbied successfully for the segregation of male and female students at Kuwait University and the prohibition of alcohol in Kuwait. Recruiting heavily among students, the SRS came to dominate the influential National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) and Kuwait University's Student Union, organizations the KMB continues to dominate. Gradually, the SRS's political influence also grew, particularly in the mid-1970s when the Government increased support for Islamist groups to balance the influence of Arab nationalists. Members of the SRS were included in the new Cabinet created after the Amir dissolved Parliament in 1976, and concessions were made to

allow the organization more influence in zakat (religious tax) collection and Islamic banking, specifically in Kuwait's first Islamic bank, the Kuwait Finance House (KFH), established in 1977. This rising influence led to the election of two SRS members in the 1981 parliamentary elections. In successive Parliaments, the organization expanded its political influence, though it increasingly had to compete with Salafi groups for support among Islamists and Kuwait's conservative tribes.

¶6. (C) The KMB reputedly split with the IMB after the Iraqi invasion, resulting in part in the establishment of the ICM. The ICM became the "political wing" of the KMB, and the SRS its "social wing." Through much of the 1990s, the ICM enjoyed strong political support and was represented in every Parliament. In the 2003 elections, however, the group suffered a crushing defeat, losing three of its five parliamentary seats. Prompted by its poor performance, the ICM dramatically altered its organizational structure, elected new, younger leaders, and adopted a "reform" agenda (ref H).

Influential, But How Popular?

¶7. (S) The ICM wields considerable political influence, as evidenced by the appointment of Dr. Ismail Al-Shatti, the head of the ICM's Ideological and Civilization Dialogue (i.e. Foreign Relations) Office, as Minister of Communications in the new Cabinet formed in February (ref D). It is more difficult, however, to determine the organization's popular support. Since the Government does not recognize political parties, there is no official party registration and ICM leaders refuse to "guess" the number of ICM members. Some observers claim the ICM "dominates" the country, having substantial support in government ministries, academia, and the financial sector. These estimates are likely overblown.

¶8. (C) Of the 13 ICM-supported candidates who ran in the 2003 parliamentary elections, including five incumbents, only Dr. Nasser Al-Sane and Mohammed Al-Basiri were re-elected, receiving 920 and 2,108 votes, respectively. This poor performance suggests the group's popular support is not as substantial as some claim. ICM officials argue, however, that elections are not indicative of the organization's true support due to Government manipulation of electoral outcomes. One credible liberal Kuwaiti political analyst estimated the number of ICM members to be "several hundred, but less than

KUWAIT 00001637 003 OF 004

500," plus a much larger, and unspecified, number of "supporters." One influential younger Al-Sabah recently told the Ambassador he believed the ICM had 27,000 members, though it was not clear if he made any distinction between the ICM and the KMB. The organization has 100 members who hold official positions, a likely indication that its base is substantially larger. The ICM is not known to be represented on the 16-member (six appointed and ten elected) Municipal Council.

The ICM's Organizational Structure and Leadership

¶9. (C) After its electoral defeat in 2003, the ICM drastically restructured, creating a 70-member General Assembly in addition to its 21-member General Secretariat and nine-member Executive Secretariat (also called the Political Office). General Assembly members, including fifteen women, elect members of the General Secretariat, which in turn choose members of the Executive Secretariat. The General Secretariat, which includes three women, meets monthly and

SIPDIS
the Executive Secretariat weekly. According to ICM officials, this re-organization was intended in part to prepare the organization to become an official political

party, once permitted by the Government.

¶10. (C) The ICM also overhauled its leadership, replacing its older, more conservative leaders with younger, more "moderate" members. Today, the ICM leadership includes Secretary General Dr. Bader Al-Nashi (46), Official Spokesman

SIPDIS

Mohammed Al-Elaim (46), and Assistant Secretary General MP Dr. Nasser Al-Sane (51), who also serves as President of the Arab Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption and Vice President of International Parliamentarians against Corruption, a Canada-based NGO.

¶11. (C) In addition, the ICM has seven offices that assist the Executive Secretariat: the Political Relations Office headed by Mohammed Al-Dallal (41); the Ideological and Civilizational Dialogue Office headed by Dr. Ismail Al-Shatti (56) (Note: Al-Shatti told Poloff this is the "Foreign Relations Office," but the ICM cannot adopt that name without provoking the Government. End note.); the Parliamentary Affairs Office headed by MP Mohammed Al-Basiri (51); the Women's Affairs Office headed by a woman, Suad Al-Jarallah; the Developmental Programs Office headed by MP Dr. Nasser Al-Sane; the Electoral Constituencies Office headed by Nasser Al-Khaldi; and the Public Relations and Media Office headed by Musaed Al-Thafiri.

¶12. (C) Key policy positions, like the decision to oppose women's suffrage, are determined by a General Assembly vote and then referred to the General and Executive Secretariats for approval. More routine decisions are made by the Secretariats. ICM leaders claim all decisions are made

SIPDIS

internally by the ICM, not the IMB. On more controversial issues, the ICM engages both Kuwaiti and regional experts to prepare studies and provide advice to better inform members before a general vote.

¶13. (C) In Parliament, the ICM operates primarily through the 13-member Islamic Bloc, a loose alliance of Islamist MPs that cooperates on certain legislation. MP Al-Sane said the ICM also coordinated with other parliamentary blocs when they supported ICM policies. In a recent interview, Al-Nashi said the ICM would support only nine candidates in the 2007 parliamentary elections to consolidate its electoral support.

¶14. (S) ICM leaders and liberal political analysts alike note that there is a conflict within the ICM between the more conservative "old guard" who led the organization up to 2003 and the new leadership, which while still socially conservative is far more pragmatic and "moderate" (on the Islamist scale). Asked who was winning the internal debate, one young, "moderate" ICM member said, "We are," but acknowledged there was still opposition within the ICM's conservative base to certain reforms. ICM members who regularly criticize the U.S. and advocate the most conservative social policies come largely from this weakened, but still influential "old guard."

Relationship between ICM and KMB

¶15. (S/NF) According to ICM Political Relations Director Mohammed Al-Dallal (strictly protect), the ICM and the KMB are "the same thing": ICM members are all Muslim Brothers,

KUWAIT 00001637 004 OF 004

but not necessarily vice-versa. Al-Dallal explained that neighborhood KMB committees voted for members of the ICM's General Assembly. When pressed, Al-Dallal admitted the KMB kept a precise database of its members by neighborhood, but refused to give a number or say how many were also members of the ICM; he casually mentioned 200 and 500 as examples of the

number of KMB members per neighborhood, but did not say whether these were actual figures nor did he give the total number of neighborhood committees. Although they have separate leadership structures, the KMB exerts some (undetermined) degree of authority over the ICM.

¶16. (S/NF) Al-Dallal told Poloff that the KMB is a "secret organization" and, except for its leading personalities, its members are kept secret. Candidates for membership must be "referred" by someone who is already a member: generally, a relative, friend, or teacher. Al-Dallal explained that the referral process includes writing a report on the candidate's loyalty, character, and trustworthiness, which is reviewed by KMB leaders before acceptance and initiation. Al-Dallal joined the KMB when he was 17-years-old after being recruited in a student group and spending "more than a year visiting their mosques and diwanias." He later became involved in the ICM through Kuwait University's Student Union (KUSU); Al-Dallal was twice elected KUSU President.

¶17. (S/NF) Support for the ICM comes mainly from students and "conservatives," here incorporating both socially conservative tribal elements and religiously conservative Muslims (i.e. Islamists). ICM members are drawn from the KMB, which recruits young people through student unions and SRS-sponsored spring and summer camps, featuring "boy scout like-activities" and Islamic-themed lectures. The KMB is also rumored to have close connections to Kuwait's Islamic financial community, specifically the Kuwait Finance House (KFH), whose advisory board, according to one report (ref I), includes several former SRS officials.

¶18. (S/NF) The exact organizational relationship between the KMB and the IMB is unclear. According to ICM leaders, the KMB's relationship with the IMB has been "frozen" since 1990. They explain that the KMB is "a separate entity," which shares a common ideology, "cooperates informally" with other branches of the IMB on charitable activities, and participates in some IMB-organized conferences and seminars, but is not subordinate to the IMB's leadership. As proof of their independence, ICM leaders note that the ICM voted to oppose women's suffrage legislation despite being strongly encouraged by other IMB branches, notably in Jordan and Egypt, to support the legislation. Nonetheless, Al-Dallal claimed the IMB was "the most active organization in the Gulf," especially the Kuwaiti branch due to the degree of freedom permitted in Kuwait.

End of Part I.

For more reporting from Embassy Kuwait, visit:
<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable s>

Visit Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

LEBARON